

No 9

Christianity shewn to be proved and supported by a sufficient Evidence; and all extraordinary Evidence to be unnecessary and improper.

A

S E R M O N

Preach'd at the

Triennial Visitation

O F T H E

Right Rev. Father in GOD,

R I C H A R D,

Lord Bishop of *Lincoln*,

Held at St. Paul's, in Bedford, on Monday,
June 25th 1733.

By LEWIS MONOUX, M. A. Rector of Sandy
in Bedfordshire.

Publish'd at the Request of his LORDSHIP, and
the CLERGY.

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SECRET

Presented to the

President of the

Right Rev. Father in God,

RICHA R D.

Lord Bishop of Lincoln



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Right Rev. Father in God,

Lord Bishop of Lincoln

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Right Rev. Father in God,

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Right Rev. Father in GOD,
R I C H A R D,

By DIVINE PERMISSION,

Lord Bishop of *Lincoln*:

And to the Reverend the

C L E R G Y,

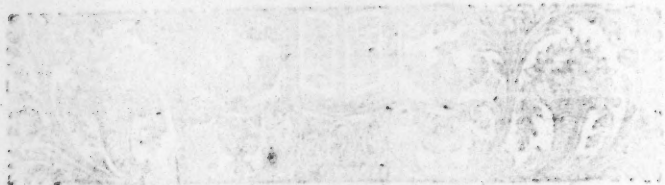
O F T H E

A R C H D E A C O N R Y,

O F

B E D F O R D.

This Discourse, published at their Request, is, with all Humility, dedicated.



TO THE

Right Rev. Father in GOD

RICHARD

By Divine Permission,

ord Bishop of Lincoln

And of the Bishopric of

CLERGY

OF THE

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OF

EDFORD

Discounts published as their Re-
it is with all Humility dedicated



JOHN iv. 48.

*Then said Jesus unto him, except ye see
Signs and Wonders, ye will not believe.*



THE prevailing Force of Prejudice and Passion, can in nothing shew itself more plainly, than in the monstrous Opposition which the Jews made to our Saviour and his Doctrine thro'out his Ministry here: The strongest Proofs of the most important Truths, could gain no admittance into Breasts so fortified against them as their's were; neither the Excellency of the Doctrine, nor the Authority of the Teacher, nor at last, even Miracles themselves could reach their Hearts; as if Passion had entirely stopped up every Inlet both of Sense and Reason against Conviction. An Instance of this Incredulity, tho' not in the highest Degree,

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gree, we have mildly reprov'd by our bleſſed Saviour in the Text : The Occaſion of which was this. A certain Nobleman of Herod's Court, having a Son at the Point of Death at *Capernaum*, deſired our Saviour who was then in *Galilee*, to go down and heal his Son ; upon which our Saviour answered him with this Reproof, *Except ye ſee Signs and Wonders, ye will not believe.* The particular Offence that the Nobleman was guilty of in this Requeſt, may not, at firſt Sight, appear ſo plainly ; for ſurely it was none barely to aſk our Saviour to heal his Son, for that was an Acknowledgment that he was able to do it, and of courſe, that *God was with him* : But ſtill there muſt be ſome latent Incredulity, ſome Diſtruſt remaining, which produced that Reproof of our Saviour ; and that there was ſo, appears by what *St. John* reports was the Conſequence of the Miracle, *viz.* that himſelf believed, and his whole Houſe, which ſuppoſes ſome deficiency of Faith before it. But before this Man could be juſtly blamed for his Unbelief, we muſt neceſſarily ſuppoſe, that Evidence had been propoſed to him ſufficient to produce Belief in him, and accordingly we find that there had ; for at the 45th Verſe of this Chapter, the *Evangelist* tells us, that the *Galileans* received him, having ſeen all the Things that he did at *Jeruſalem*, at the Feaſt : And thoſe Things which thus convinced

vinced the *Galileans* being *done* on so public an Occasion, the *Jews* also must have been Spectators of them as well as *They*; so that he and his Country-men must have had the *same*, at least, if not *greater* Evidence than these believing *Galileans*. Our Saviour, therefore, in the Text, reproves this noble *Herodian*, and in him, his unbelieving Brethren (for it is conceiv'd in the plural Number, *except ye see, &c. ye will not believe*) I say, he here reproves this Noble-man and his Brethren, for their obstinate Refusal of him, upon *greater*, or at least, the *same* Evidence, on which the unprejudiced *Galileans* so gladly received him, and which was sufficient to beget the Conviction of any sincere and dispassionate Enquirer.

It appears then from the Nature of our Saviour's Answer, and from the light which the Contest affords us, that the particular Crime here reprov'd, is, the not yielding a degree of *Assent* proportionable to the degree of *Evidence* produced, and the unreasonable demanding of *more* and *greater* Evidence, than the Nature of the Thing to be proved, required. So that these Words of our Saviour may be thus paraphras'd.

“ You desire me to come and heal your Son; now this I know you do, not only thro' a Desire of having your Son restored to Health, but also thro' a vain and unreasonable Curiosity of seeing me work ano-
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“ther Miracle: These *Galileans*, to whom
 “I am now preaching, you see, receive me
 “with gladness, on account of the Miracles
 “they saw me do at your Feast; but tho’
 “you *Jews* saw the same Miracles wrought
 “in Confirmation of the same reasonable
 “Doctrine, yet *except ye see Signs and Won-*
 “*ders without End, ye will not believe.*

I am sorry to observe that the same unrea-
 sonable Conduct, makes the same Reproof
 so justly applicable to many Persons in this
 present Age; and makes this Subject, which
 may be at any time useful, at this time more
 particularly necessary.

In the prosecution of it, I shall proceed by
 the following Steps.

First, I shall state the Evidence which we
now have for the Christian Religion. And

Secondly, Shall show the Nature and De-
 gree of that Evidence, and the Degree of
 Assent that it is sufficient to produce, which
 Degree of Assent must be that which is re-
 quired. And

Thirdly, That Faith, or that Degree of As-
 sent which we have shown the Evidence of
 Christianity to be sufficient to produce, is
 likewise sufficient to support the Weight of
 Christianity. Or in other Words: That Faith
 is sufficient to support a reasonable and pru-
 dent Man, under all the Difficulties and Re-
 straints Christianity imposes. Therefore,

Fourthly

Fourthly, That a superior Evidence is unnecessary, and upon that Account, improper; and consequently, that the demand of such is unreasonable.

First, I am to state the Evidence we *now* have for the Christian Religion.

All that we know of Christian Religion is contained in the New Testament, or rather, in the Four Gospels, and the Acts of the Apostles; which contain the Life and Actions of *Jesus Christ*, who was the *Author*, and of his *Apostles*, who were the first *Propagators*, of this Religion: the *Epistles* being designed rather as Comments or Explinations of some particular Points of Doctrine contained in the Gospels, than to propose any new Religion themselves; yet thereby they strengthen and confirm the Testimony of the Gospel-writers. Our Religion then relying entirely on the Scripture History, the proper way to prove the Religion, must be to prove the Truth and Genuineness of that History, and show the Credit that is due to it: For if the History it self is not allowed to be Credible, all the Proofs of Christianity that are deduced from it, will lose their Force. Thus for Instance: If any one were to urge our Saviour's Miracles as a Proof of his divine Mission, the Argument would hold good with regard to one who acknowledged the Authority of the Scripture History; but with one who did not, the immediate Reply

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would

would be, “ prove that he worked any Miracles, and I will believe ; for I know no Body who says he did, besides a History whose Authority I question, and a few credulous Enthusiasts who have built upon it.”

And the same would be the Case with regard to the Completion of the Scripture Prophecies, and all other Arguments that are taken from the Scriptures : So that the Authority of the Scripture Proofs, *when acknowledged*, can rise no higher than the Fountain from whence they spring. The Original Evidence of Christianity then arising out of the Scriptures, the Proofs of it will have just as much force as the Authority of that History will give them. In order, therefore, to give the true State of the present Evidence of Christianity, we must show the Credibility of the History which contains it.

And this is *usually*, and very properly done, by showing that the Authors of it were *capable* and *faithful* Historians ; or were sufficiently instructed *Themselves*, and have, without false Colour or Deceit, reported to *Us*, the Facts and Doctrines contained in their History ; and that this History is delivered down to us as it came from their Hands, without any *material* Alteration.

With regard to their own Information, it is proper to observe, that the chief Account we have of it, is from their own History, which it is reasonable to believe true in that

part

particular, till we see some contrary Testimony to prove it otherwise. The Account, therefore, which they give us of their Opportunity of Information, (propable in itself, and universally receiv'd ever since) is this, *viz.* That two of the Gospel Writers, *Matthew* and *John*, conversed intimately and constantly with our Saviour during all the time of his Ministry here on Earth, and that therefore *They* tell us no more, than, in *St. John's* own Words in the beginning of his first Epistle, *what They had heard, what They had seen with their Eyes, what They had looked upon, and Their Hands had handled of the Word of Life*; so that allowing them to have common Sense, the Opportunities of *their* Information are indisputable.

With regard to the other two *Evangelists*, *Mark*, and *Luke*, I know it has been a received Opinion, that *They* had their Information only at Second-hand from some of the Apostles, particularly from *St. Peter* and *St. Paul*, whom they attended in their Ministry. And this Opinion seems to be countenanced in some Measure from the Preface to *St. Luke's* Gospel: But since there are many strong Reasons which show that the Asserters of that Opinion have misunderstood this Place, and that *St. Luke* really intended by it to assert his own superior Information and Capacity for that Undertaking, over those who only ἐπεχειροῦσαν took in hand to write such

a Narration, without being able to execute it in a proper Manner, for that very Reason, because they had their Information only at Second-hand from the Eye-witnesses ; we may more reasonably conclude, that these two Evangelists had likewise a sensible Evidence of the Facts which they relate * ; especially if the Authorities of Origen and Epiphanius † be allowed any weight, who expressly assert that They were both of them in the Number of the seventy two, whom our Saviour sent out before him, with a Commission to preach the Gospel, and to work Miracles in confirmation of it ; for it is certain that at *That* time, when the Gospel was to be first published, none but Eye-witnesses were qualified to be Ministers of the Word || . So that upon the whole, we have Reason to think, that these two Evangelists had the same Evidence as the two Apostles. It is impossible therefore for any Historians to be better instructed for their Work than these must be, who had a sensible Demonstration of all the Facts and Doctrines which they record ; allowing then that they enjoyed the free use of their Senses, and a common Measure of Understanding, They could not be deceived themselves.

* Vid. *Whitby's* Preface to the Gospel of St. *Luke* ; and *Lightfoot's* *Horæ Hebraicæ*, on Verse the third, of the first Chapter.

† The Passages are quoted by Dr. *Whitby*, in the forementioned Preface.

|| Vid. *Lightfoot's* *Horæ Hebraicæ*, on Verse the second, of the first Chapter of St. *Luke*.

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Which being settled ; our next Enquiry is into their Sincery and Fidelity, or whether they have not conspired together to deceive us.

Now before we can reasonably suspect them to have been guilty of this, we should be able to assign some Cause that might induce them to it : And all the imaginable Causes of such Fraud, must be included in these general ones ; *viz.* either the *procuring some good, real, or imaginary* ; or the *avoiding some real, or imaginary Evil*. If therefore we can show, that by *adhering* to their Testimony, They brought upon themselves *real and great Evils*, and might by *renouncing*, or even *with-holding* it, have procured *great Good*, we must either subscribe to their Sincerity, or else be driven to this Absurdity, of insisting upon an Effect *without a Cause*, or what is worse, of insisting upon an Effect *contrary to a Cause* ; by asserting (as we must necessarily in that Case do) either that They have deceived us without any Cause at all, or else for a Cause, which at the same time we acknowledge proves that They have not deceived us, *viz.* their choosing Evil as such, and their refusing Good as such, for no other assignable Reason, than that They would not forego their Testimony.

And that by thus steadily adhering to their Testimony, the Apostles brought upon themselves *real and great Evils*, we may appeal to the

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the concurring Reports of all the Writers of those Times and Things ; who all unite in assuring us, that after a Life wearied out with perpetual Watchings and Labour, with cruel Mockings, Scourgings, and Imprisonments, They *deliberately* suffered Death itself, under all the various Ingenuity of Torture that enraged Malice could invent, rather than bely themselves, and deny their Lord and Master.

And on the other Side it appears as plain from the whole Conduct of the *Jews*, that they would have thought nothing too great or good for the Apostles, if they would have renounced their Testimony, and have joined them : For if they bribed high the Guard, who watched our Saviour's Sepulchre, to vent a poor ill-contrived Lye, that any Child might see thro', What might not an Apostle have expected, if he would have been venal too, and have furnished them with Materials to have crushed Christianity at once ? So that in short, there can be no Account given of their thus *deliberately* suffering all the Miseries, and foregoing all the Pleasures of *this Life*, but their Sense of Duty, and their confident Expectation of more exalted and lasting Pleasures, which God promised, as the Reward of their Stedfastness and Integrity in the *next Life*.

These are convincing Reasons why the Apostles *should* not deceive us ; but we have fur

Further direct Proof that they *have* not done
 so, which is this :

'Tis a Rule in all Evidence, and agreeable
 to the strickest Reason, that That Testimony
 should be allowed true, when the Persons,
 whose Business and Interest it is to disprove
 it, either do not attempt it, or do not succeed
 in it if they do. Now in the Case before us,
 three of the Gospels, and the Acts of the A-
 postles, and many other of the Apostolical
 Writings, were published to the World in the
 life-time of many of the Persons concerned to
 confute them, if they were false ; that is,
 within 25 or 30 Years after our Saviour's As-
 cension ; when it's certain, that many of the
 pretended Objects, and more of the Specta-
 tors of our Saviour's Miracles, and Hearers of
 his Doctrine, must have been still living and
 able to have disproved their Testimony, and
 have freed the World from so great an Impos-
 sibility. Could the many Thousands that the
 Evangelists pretend that Jesus miraculously
 healed, and miraculously fed, think themselves
 unconcerned in doing this ? Could the vast
 Multitudes that the Apostles pretend were
 eye-witnesses of their Miracles in the great
 and populous Cities of *Jerusalem, Samaria,*
Caesarea, Damascus, and Ephesus ; I say, could
 all these think themselves unconcerned in con-
 fronting their Evidence, and discovering the
 imposture ? No ; the Interest and Malice of
 the *Jew*, and the Pride and Self-sufficiency of
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the *Greek*, would have made them Openmouthed against Them; we should have seen the Triumphs of the exulting *Pharisees*, and the *Grecian* Orators would have exhausted all their Treasures of Eloquence, in exposing the *Foolishness * of their Preaching*. But since nothing of This was so much as aimed at, since They whose *Business*, whose *Interest*, whose every *Passion* excited, nay, whose *Duty* obliged them to do so, were *All* silent; I say this is a direct and positive Evidence, and allowed so in all the like Cases, that They were *faithful Witnesses*, and that the *Miracles* of our Saviour and his Apostles were really and undeniably *done*, and their *Doctrine* taught in Manner and Form, as related in their History.

In the next Place we come to enquire whether the Accounts of Christianity, which we have found sufficient Reason to believe the Apostles were well instructed in themselves and have faithfully published to the World have been transmitted down to us as They came from their Hands, without any *essential*, or *material* Alteration.

And under this Article, we must confess that the original Copies of these Records are lost; nor can we, upon any sure Grounds, at this time determine, how many Removes our oldest and best Manuscripts may be from the

Originals *, or how carefully they were transcribed or corrected from them ; so that 'tis no Wonder that they differ in some *immaterial* Points thro' literal Mistakes which are unavoidable by the most careful Transcribers : But that the Transcribers have been guilty of no *material* Mistakes or Frauds, their *universal* Agreement amongst themselves in all the *Essentials* of Christianity, and the *exact* *Conformity* of our Religion at present, formed upon the Plan of these Records, as we now find them, *with that* of the first and purest Ages of Christianity, when the Originals themselves were extant, do clearly evince. But farther ; even during the Lives of the Apostles themselves, there were great Numbers of Transcripts made and spread into different Parts ; and soon after their Deaths, we find their Writings translated into almost all the known Languages in the World, and read constantly in their Assemblies for divine Worship ; so that before we can admit of any *material* Alteration or Mistake in them, we must suppose all the Christians in the World, separated asunder many thousand Miles to conspire in it † ; the Absurdity of which, it must be needless to point out.

* 'Tis probable They are not above one or two, because some of our oldest MSS. are within a Century of the time, when, we have Reason to think from *Tertul*, many of the Originals themselves were extant. De Præscript. Cap. 36. Vid. Prolegom. MSS. Qualitat. Præfix. Testamento Wettstenii, *Amstel* 1711. Concerning the designed Alteration of the Gospels in *Alexandria*'s time, at *Constantinople*, mentioned by *Victor*, in his *Concordance*, see *Phileleutherus Lipsiensis*, in the latter End of the first Let. And Dr. *Ibbot's*, *Boyle's* Lect. Sermon. 4.

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It may not be improper to observe farther that our present Scriptures contain in themselves no *internal Marks* of Fraud. For if there had been any Fraud, it is reasonable to imagine, that either it would have been such as would have given some Indulgence to the natural Appetites of Mankind, as the Religion of *Mahomet* doth; or such as would have tended some way or other, to encrease the Power or Revenues of the Clergy, as the *Roman Catholicks* have done by their abominable Perversions of these Scriptures, and by their forged Traditions: But if we examine our present Scriptures ever so narrowly, I am satisfied we shall find no such Mark of Fraud in them, nothing that will justify the least *irregular* Indulgence of our Appetites, or any *exorbitant* Claims of the Clergy; however some Expressions in them, may, thro' an *imprudent Zeal*, have been perverted to the purpose by some among us.

But besides these presumptive Proofs, the plainest and directest Proof of this Matter must be taken from the successive Tradition of the Christian Church; which in this Point is clear and distinct from the Age of the Apostles, down to our present times. In the first three Centuries, the Tradition runs distinctly for each Book; and from the beginning of the fourth, when the Canon of Scripture was universally agreed upon, we find the Appeals generally made to them in the Bul-

as the received Pandects of the Christian Law.

I have designedly omitted considering these Writings as any other than a credible *human* Testimony, because the directest and fullest Proof of the divine Inspiration of their Authors being to be taken from the Writings themselves, They being once proved from other Considerations to be a credible History; the Evidence they give to their own Inspiration, will of course stand upon the same Degree of Credibility as any other Fact they relate; and as it does so, it will not alter the Nature, and Degree of the Evidence of Christianity in general. So that the Evidence itself being now stated, our next Business is, under our

Second Head, To show the *Nature* and *Degree* of this Evidence, and the *Measure* of *Assent* that is *justly* due to it, which of course must be that Assent which is required.

And in the first Place, with regard to the *Nature* of this Evidence, it must appear at the first View, to be purely *Historical*, grounded upon *human Testimony*, for that is all the *external* Evidence, that Facts done before the Memory of Man, are *naturally* capable of: And what has been by some Writers, called the *internal* Evidence of a Revelation, is at least called by a wrong Name. * For what is this internal Evidence? why, no more

* Vid. Dr. Conybeare's Def. of Rev. Relig. Pag. 431. 1 Ed.
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than this, that the Revelation should contain nothing in it that contradicts either natural Religion, or the Essentials of an acknowledged precedent Revelation, and that it contain in it great Marks of Wisdom, and deliver such Rules of Action as are well contrived for the universal Good: And what will all this directly prove? Why, that such System was the product of great Wisdom and Understanding and that for ought that appears, it *may possibly* be from God: But this contributes nothing to show that it is *actually so*; nor can any *internal* Evidence be Positive in that Point, because it must proceed upon the Supposition of the Truth of that Revelation which it is brought to prove true. These therefore may more properly be called *necessary Characters*, or Marks of Truth in a Revelation, *without* which, it could never be *acknowledged* to be Divine, no more than by which it could ever be *proved* to be so.

The Point before us then being capable of no other Proof than *human Testimony*, must plainly be of the probable Kind, for *That* cannot carry any thing above a *possibility* of being false, but only beyond any *just* Cause of being *thought* so; because as human Testimony *may* deceive, it cannot render any Proposition absolutely certain; but when we have all imaginable Reason to think it has not deceived, it then makes it greatly probable.

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The immediate Testimony of God, indeed, produces as certain an Assent as the highest Evidence of Sense or Reason can do ; but it does not follow from thence that the Scriptures *at present* will produce such Assent ; because, as I observed before, we have only human Evidence of their being from God, so that we can only *believe* them to be so ; but when once we do so believe them, we ought in Reason to pay as implicit an Obedience to them, as They do who both implicitly receive and obey them ; for it is enough to ground a due deference to the Scriptures upon, that we are convinced of their divine Authority on a *sufficient* Evidence, tho' not on the *highest*. But tho' in *kind*, the Evidence of our Religion be but *probable*, yet

Secondly, It is in the highest Degree of that kind, and approaches the highest to certainty that human Evidence can carry it. For did ever any Historians produce such undoubted Testimonies of their Instruction for their Work, or such irrefragable Tests of their Integrity in the execution of it ? Did ever any Writings withstand, unshaken, so malicious a Severity of Inquiry thro' each cavilling Age, and triumph over the united Powers of the Earth ? Can any other Religion, boast of that highest Testimony of Martyrdom, or to have withstood the Trial of ten dismal Persecutions, as Christianity has, by which its

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Martyrs delivered it down to their respective Successors, on the same Evidence on which they received it themselves ? But to be more particular :

The proper Way of measuring the several Degrees of Probability, arising from human Testimony, is, by comparing the Number and Integrity of the Attesters, with the Number and Integrity of the Witnesses who give a contrary Testimony, if such there be, or can be, (which in the Case before us, there is room enough for, the whole Affair being transacted in the most publick Manner ;) and upon such Comparison, by how much the Witnesses on the one Side, exceed in Number and Integrity, those on the other Side, so much clear positive Evidence must be allowed to that Side, which must naturally produce a proportioned Degree of Probability and Credit to their Testimony. Let us Measure then the Degree of Probability on which Christianity stands by this Rule. We have produced the Witnesses on our Side, and shown the Marks of their Integrity, and their Number is well known ; let us see whether there be any against us, I am persuaded we shall find none : For any *direct* Evidence against us must be, either in showing us that there was no such Person as *Jesus Christ*, or that he did not *do* and *suffer* what our Witnesses say he did ; or else in showing us by *positive Proof*, that

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the Writings which we pretend to be the Records of the Evidence on our Side, are all forged. It is plain then, that we may strike out of the usual List of contrary Testimony, with Respect to our Saviour, all who did not live at the *Time when*, and at the *Place where*, it is asserted he *did* and *suffered* as is alledged, as being not equally competent Witnesses with our's; and out of the List of contrary Testimony, with respect to the genuineness of our Records, all but they who give *direct* Evidence of some *actual* Forgery, as not being to the purpose. These being laid aside, what contrary Evidence do we find? Why, with regard to the first Particular, plainly none: *Jews*, and *Heathens* confess that there was such a Person as *Jesus*, and that he *did*, and *suffered* as is alledged by our Witnesses. 'Tis true, They ascribe his Miracles to the Power of the Devil, instead of that of GOD; but this is confessing the Matters of Fact, and only disputing the Power by which they were wrought, which controversy, the *Nature* and *Design* of them will clearly decide. With respect to the second Particular, there have been some Books of our Cannon questioned, but they were *only* questioned; there has been no *direct* Evidence produced, to fix the Forgery, and they were soon received universally upon a clear Authority. If there appears any contrary Testimony, their Number

and Integrity will still remain to be compared with those of the Asserters, and to be judged of according as it comes off in the Comparison : And if at last the *disputed* Books were given up, *They* are not the *only* Books, nor do *They alone* contain any Essential of Christianity ; so that *That* might stand its ground upon the strength of the *undisputed* ones only. Upon the whole then, we may safely say, that Christianity stands upon the *uncontradicted* Evidence of *many, well-informed, upright* Witnesses ; which being the highest Degree of Testimony, produces the highest Degree of Probability.

The Degree of Assent due to this, will give us very little Trouble to fix ; for as Probability in its several Degrees, produces that sort of Assent which we call Belief in its several Degrees ; so the highest Degree of Probability, should of course beget in us, the highest and firmest Degree of Belief, or what in Scripture Language we call *Faith*.

And as the *Ground and Measure* of all Assent, is the Evidence produced, so the *reasonableness* of all Assent, must consequently, consist in adjusting it to the several Degrees of such Evidence ; and therefore it must be as unreasonable to deny a *proper* Degree of Assent to any given *inferior* Degree of Evidence, as it is to withhold the *highest* Assent from a *sensible or demonstrative* Proof. And

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on the other Side, 'tis as unreasonable to give or demand a *higher* Degree of Assent than the Evidence will justify, as it is to with-hold a *proper* one ; Therefore *They* are as unreasonable, who in this Case, insist upon the Assent due to an absolute Certainty (except in those Particulars of Christianity, which are capable of Demonstration, as well as Testimony) as *They* are, who refuse their *Belief* to the *clearest Historical* Evidence. It remains then, that, as Faith, or the firmest Belief, is the Degree of Assent which the Evidence of Christianity naturally produces, and *all* the Assent that it is sufficient *now* to procure, it must be likewise that Assent which is required.

Thus far some of our Adversaries will go along with us ; but we are now come to a Point where *They* leave us ; which is, under our

Third Head, to show, That Faith, or that Degree of Assent, which we have shown the Evidence of Christianity to be sufficient to produce, is likewise sufficient to support the Weight of Christianity. Or in other Words ; that Faith is sufficient to support a reasonable and prudent Man, under all the Difficulties and Restraints, Christianity imposes. And here, I say, some of our Adversaries will own, that from the Evidence we have given, it is *probable*, that Christianity may be of divine Original as we represent it ; but then,

say they, We lay more upon this Evidence than it will bear ; must They forego all the *certain* Pleasures of this Life, and engage in a constant Course of Mortification and Self-denial, only on the *Hopes* of a Recompence in a future State ? Will *bare Belief*, They say, justify a prudent Man, in submitting to those severe Restraints, Christianity requires ; and what is more, to those dreadful Trials it sometimes exposes us to ? No ; if that is the Case, They say, that they may reasonably expect greater Evidence, and that their Reward may be as certain as their Sufferings : And therefore with the Noble-man in the Text, *Except they see Signs and Wonders, they will not believe*, or rather conform.

It might be sufficient to obviate this Objection, to show that it is built upon a false Foundation : For Christianity is so far from laying Mankind under so irksome Restraints as it is here represented to do, that the Service of God, according to the Rules of it, is the most *perfect Freedom* ; and it were easy to show, that a Man undergoes more Slavery from one indulged Appetite, or one uncurbed Passion, than from all the Restraints of Christianity together ; and that the *Commandments of God are so far from being Grievous* that to a reasonable Man, exclusive of all Consideration of their being commanded by GOD ; they would be the Object of his Choice,

Choice, as being the Cause of his Pleasure; excepting only the Case of Persecution, wherein, I must confess, it is reasonable to expect, that when so severe a Duty is required, some extraordinary Assistances should be administred. Tho' this, I say, might be enough to clear this Point in *general*, yet with regard to the *Objectors*, it is not: For *their* Passions being used to be indulged in the unconfin'd Pleasures of a dissolute Life, will represent the *easy Yoke* of Christ to them, as gauling; and being backed by Habit, will struggle hard against any Restraints whatever; so that on the *first Change*, on the *first Encounter* with Passions, and Habits unused to be controuled, it must be owned that there are great Difficulties to be passed through. Let us see then, whether the Evidence we have for Christianity, be sufficient to engage a rational, and prudent Man in this Conflict, and to support him thro' it.

The true State of the Question (according to the before-stated Evidence of Christianity) will be This: Whether it be reasonable and prudent for a Man to submit willingly to some *certain temporal* Infelicity, on the *highest probable Hopes* of eternal Happiness, as his Reward if he does, and thro' the *equally probable Fears* of eternal Misery, as his Punishment if he does not.

Now in order to determine this Question, with regard to the reasonableness of such a

Conduct, I shall observe, that tho' we have allowed the Evidence of Christianity not to produce an *absolute Certainty*, yet we assert nevertheless, that it produces an *undoubting Conviction*: For he who assents to a Proposition on a Testimony that he cannot *reasonably* doubt, if he lets Reason guide him in that Act, has in Fact, no more *actual doubt*, than he who assents to a Proposition on an Evidence that he cannot *possibly* doubt: If then the Evidence of Christianity produces in all rational Men undoubting Conviction, tho' we should allow that we cannot *possibly* doubt of the *Difficulties* and *Restraints* of it; yet if we have proved that we cannot *reasonably* doubt of the *Rewards* and *Punishments* of it; it will plainly follow, that we cannot, consistently with Reason, refuse to undergo the *Former*, tho' *certain*, thro' distrust of the *Latter*, because *undoubted*.

But by this Reasoning, perhaps, I may be thought to put the Evidence of Sense and Testimony upon the same footing: No; If we consider it, it will appear otherwise. For tho' I assert, that in this Case, they both exclude all *actual* doubt, with an unprejudiced Man, yet they do not both exclude all *possibility* of it: For human Testimony being liable to *error* thro' every Stage of it, must be equally liable to *doubt*; but tho' it be *liable* to it, yet if there appear no *just Cause* of it, the

the Mind of a rational Man will rest, and act upon such Evidence, as effectually, as if there were no *possible Cause* of it; and that, not because the Evidences are equal, but because the lower being sufficient, and the strongest that the Nature of the Thing admits of, it would be unreasonable to do otherwise, and a reasonable Man will no more do an *unreasonable Thing*, than he *can* do an *impossible* one.

In the Eye of Prudence, this Evidence will appear still more plainly sufficient to justify such a Conduct. For what *temporal* Difficulties would not a Man *in prudence* undergo, rather than run even the *least* Risque of incurring *eternal* Misery? much more will the short Struggles, which attend only the first change from a sensual to a christian Life, appear trifling, when compared with the *greatest* Risque; especially when he hath, at the same time, his Hopes enlivened with the ravishing Prospect of immortal Bliss.

We see, therefore, that in the strictest View of Reason, the Evidence we have for Christianity, is not only sufficient, convincingly to prove its Truth, but also effectually to support its Weight, and to justify a wise and prudent Man, in submitting to its *common* Difficulties and Restraints: And as to its *uncommon* Difficulties, in the supposed Case of *Persecution*, as *That* has, in every Shape, (blessed be GOD) been long since banished
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these happy Isles, it may be sufficient with regard to *That*, to observe in *general*, that when God requires an *extraordinary Duty* of his faithful Servants, they may rest satisfied, that he will afford them *extraordinary Assistan-*
ances, to enable them to perform it. And this brings me to my

Fourth and *last* general Head, which is to show, That, since the Evidence produced is sufficient to beget the Assent required, and the Assent required is sufficient to support the Weight imposed; therefore any superiour or extraordinary Evidence is unnecessary and improper, and of course the demand of such unreasonable; and that therefore tho' we see not *Signs and Wonders*, yet if we see *just* and *reasonable Proofs*, we ought to believe.

And with respect to this Head, I need only observe, that all Evidence more than what is sufficient for the Purposes specified, must plainly be unnecessary, and as such, improper too, because God would, by giving it, do an unnecessary thing to gratify unreasonable Men, which, if they had been reasonable, they would not have wanted: And this is the *direct* and *undeniable* Consequence of the sufficiency of the present Evidence, and needs not to be further enlarged upon. But tho' this might suffice for the Argument, and I might rest the Matter here; yet it will still more plainly evince the *great* Unreasonable-

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ness of all Demands of extraordinary Evidence, if it shall appear, that all such Evidence, is not only unnecessary, and therefore that it is unreasonable for us to ask it; but also that it is *in it self* highly improper, and therefore morally impossible for God to grant it.

Now all superiour Evidence in this Case, must be, either the Testimony of Persons working Miracles, thro' every Age, in confirmation of it; or else an immediate Impression from God, upon the Mind of every distinct Person in every Age.

As to the former of these, we have seen from several Instances among the *Jews*, that when once Passion has got a thorough Possession of the Mind, even Miracles themselves fail of convincing: And if that was the Case then, how much more would it be so now; when by their frequency, tho' they would not cease to appear miraculous to *rational* Men, yet they would in a great Measure lose their Effect, by ceasing to excite the Curiosity of Mankind *in general*; so that few would be induced by them, to enter on an inquiry of this Nature. But allowing that they would have the Effect that the Patrons of this Opinion expect from them, *viz.* that the World *must* yield to the force of them; then, I say, this kind of Evidence would be improper for the same
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Reasons, that the second sort of superiour Evidence I mentioned, namely, an immediate Impression from God, &c. is so; which are these.

First, Because the giving such Evidence would not be dealing with us as *rational* and *accountable* Creatures. And

Second, Because it would frustrate the very End of Christianity itself.

First, then, I think, no one can deny that it is in the Power of God, to give all Mankind an absolute Certainty of this, or any other Proposition, by an immediate Impression upon the Mind, in such manner that the Person who receives such Impression can no more doubt of the Truth of it, than if he had a sensible or demonstrative Knowledge of it: And in the Case of Miracles wrought in confirmation of any Testimony, we will grant also the Evidence to be undeniable; the Consequence of which, is, that in both these Cases, the Mind, without any premeditation, yields its Assent; because it is constrained by an Evidence, which even at first View, excludes all *possible* doubt; and whatever excludes all *possibility* of doubt, excludes also *all use of Reason* in assenting, because I cannot help assenting to what I cannot possibly doubt of, an irresistible Evidence on the Understanding, as much excluding all use of Reason

son in judging, as an irresistible Influence on the Will, does all Freedom of choos- ing; and both of them rendring the Acti- ons consequent upon them equally unac- countable, because equally unavoidable. If therefore all such extraordinary Evidence, supersedes the use of Reason, and conse- quently the Merit and Demerit of our Acti- ons; the giving such an Evidence, would be dealing with us as Creatures whose Rea- son is *not* their Guide, and as Creatures who are *not* accountable for their Actions; i. e. it would be dealing with us *contrary* to what we *are*, and to the *Truth* of *Things*, which is not only improper, but morally im- possible for God to do.

Lastly, All such over-bearing Evidence, wou'd frustrate the very End of Christianity itself.

The End and Design of Christianity in particular, and of all Religion in general, is to bring Mankind to that Happiness, of which their Nature makes them capable; and that it does, by training and exercis- ing our Faculties here, in order to prepare us for the Enjoyment of that spiritual Hap- piness hereafter, which was designed as the End of our Nature. We should, therefore, consider Christianity as a System of Duties calculated for this great End, and as such, when proposed to us, it must in its Nature be

be a Trial of the preceeding Sincerity, of the general good or evil Disposition of our Hearts : It was necessary, therefore, for this End, that Christianity should only be *offer- ed* to us, and not *forced* upon us ; offered to us on an Evidence that should be abundantly sufficient to convince the Reason of a dispassionate Man, tho' not to over-beat the Passions of an obstinate one. On the contrary ; if this System of Duty had been *forced upon* our *Understandings* indiscriminately, by an *irresistible Evidence*, instead of being *proposed* to our *Reason* on a *rational one*, it could have been no Trial of the Sincerity of our Intentions, and the Uprightness of our Hearts ; but the good and bad *must necessarily* have assented, whereby the former would have lost the Merit and Reward of a rational Conviction ; and the latter (equally contrary to the Reason of Things) have escaped the Punishment of an irrational Incredulity ; and consequently, the very End and Design of Christianity, of separating the good from the bad, by proper Trials, must thereby have been frustrated and defeated, which again, is impossible for God to do.

And now upon the whole, I hope, it appears plainly, that we have a rational and sufficiently well-grounded Evidence for our Religion, and that all extraordinary irresistible

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ble Evidence, is not only unnecessary, but *in itself* also, improper, as being inconsistent with our Nature, as reasonable and accountable Creatures, and with the very End and Design of Christianity itself; and if so, the Consequence deduced from thence must be as plain, namely, That the Demand of all such is extreemly unreasonable and absurd, and that we *ought to believe, tho' we see not Signs and Wonders.*

I have now gone through what I had to offer on this Subject, and I shall trespass no longer upon your Patience, than to observe; That as we are fallen into those difficult Times, wherein the Adversaries of our Religion are so numerous, and so assiduous in their Opposition: It becomes *every Christian* who has had a *liberal Education*, to enable himself to withstand the Attacks, which he will frequently find made, upon his holy Faith: But more particularly is it *our Duty*, who *are set for the Defence of the Gospel*, to prepare our selves to *give a Reason of the Hope that is in us*, and always to take *particular Care* to do it according to the Apostle's Direction, *with Meekness and Fear*, as becomes those who contend for Truth, and not for *Interest or Victory*. And then we may safely trust, that our Saviour will make good his Promise, that *the Gates of Hell shall never prevail against his Church;* and

and that, though the Rains descend, and the Floods come, though the Winds of Infidelity blow from every Corner, yet still, This House of GOD, This spiritual Building, founded on the Rock of Truth itself, shall never fall but that, as it has hitherto, under GOD's good Providence, been supported by the Apologies of its learned Advocates, it will in his good Time, likewise, glory in the Conviction of its baffled Adversaries.

Which that it may, God of his infinite Mercy grant, thro' Jesus Christ our Lord.

F I N I S.

